

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ADP-00 CIAE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00

NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-15 OMB-01 RSR-01

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R 080930Z AUG 73

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7177

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

CINCPAC

DOD WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANILA 9068

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

DEFENSE FOR DIA ALSO

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, RP

SUBJECT: COTABATO REBEL GROUP REPORTEDLY SURRENDERS

REF: MANILA 8864

1. ACCORDING AFP INTELLIGENCE OFFICER WHO BRIEFS EMBASSY, MAJOR GOVT OPERATION IN TRAN BARRIO, LEBAK MUNICIPALITY, COTABATO (NORTH) PROVINCE OFFICIALLY TERMINATED ON AUG 4. 900 REBELS REPORTEDLY SURRENDERED TO CENTRAL MINDANAO COMMAND (CEMCON), AND SEPARATE GROUP OF ABOUT 900 NON-COMBATANTS WHO FORMERLY INHABITED TRAN BUT HAD FLED TO HILLS ALSO "SURRENDERED." IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, AFP OFFICER STATED HE WAS NOT FAMILIAR WITH DETAILS OF SURRENDER AND DID NOT KNOW IF REBELS HAD GIVEN UP WEAPONS. HE DID SAY HE THOUGHT SURRENDER RESULTED FROM
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NEGOTIATIONS SUPERVISED BY CEMCON AND SPECULATED THAT

REBELS WOULD BE ALLOWED TO RETURN HOME AFTER PROCESSING. AFP FORCES IN TRAN AREA, HE SAID, WOULD BE MOVED ELSEWHERE IN COTABATO, PARTICULARLY TO PARANG AREA, WHERE 4TH PHIL CONSTABULARY HEADQUARTERS IS LOCATED, TO OPERATE AGAINST OTHER REBEL GOUPS. DESPITE APPARENT SIGNIFICANCE OF REPORTED SURRENDER, HE CHARACTERIZED OVERALL SITUATION IN PROVINCE AS STILL SERIOUS. (ELSEWHERE IN SOUTHERN PHILS, AFP OFFICER REPORTED REBELS STOPPED CIVILIAN BUS IN ZAMBOANGA DEL SUR ON JULY 31 AND EXECUTED 11 CIVILIAN CHRISTIAN PASSENGERS. IN SULU PROVINCE, REBELS PROBED PERIMETER OF PHIL AIR FORCE BASE AT SANGA-SANGA ON TAWI-TAWI ISLAND.)

2. IN SPEECH AT AUG 8 PC ANNIVERSARY CEREMONY, PRESIDENT MARCOS PROCLAIMED A COMPLETE VICTORY OVER REBEL FORCES IN COTABATO. MARCOS STATED THAT HE HAD JUST RECEIVED A REPORT FROM CEMCON COMMANDER BRIG GEN ABAT THAT THE LAST POCKET OF REBEL RESISTANCE HAD BEEN ELIMINATED AND THAT PEACE AND ORDER HAD BEEN RESTORED IN THE PROVINCE. IN HIS REMARKS, MARCOS ACKNOWLEDGED CONTINUING RESISTANCE IN BASILAN AND SULU. COMMENTS OF PRESIDENT FOLLOW RECENT PRESS STATEMENTS BY AFP CHIEF OF STAFF GEN ESPINO AND PC DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF BRIG GEN PECHACHE THAT COTABATO IS PEACEFUL, ROADS ARE SAFE TO TRAVEL AND EVACUEES HAVE RETURNED TO THEIR HOMES.

3. COMMENT: FIGHTING IN LEBAK, WHICH HAS TIED DOWN FIVE AFP BATTALIONS FOR TWO MONTHS, HAD BECOME PRINCIPAL POINT OF REBEL RESISTANCE IN COTABATO. THERE HAS BEEN NO MENTION OF SURRENDER IN PRESS, AND EMBASSY DOES NOT HAVE FURTHER DETAILS. SEC NAT DEF PONCE ENRILE TOLD EMBOFF ON AUG 6 THAT GOP HAD SCORED MAJOR VICTORY IN LEBAK, AND PUBLIC COMMENTS BY PRESIDENT WOULD SEEM TO INDICATE THAT GOP CONSIDERS REPORTED SURRENDER A SIGNIFICANT SUCCESS. NEVERTHELESS, IN ABSENCE OF CONFIRMATION OF NUMBER OF REBELS AND WEAPONS INVOLVED IN SURRENDER, IT NOT YET POSSIBLE TO EVALUATE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS REPORT. LARGE SEMI-INDEPENDENT REBEL GROUPS ARE STILL ACTIVE IN OTHER PARTS OF PROVINCE, AND THEY WILL HAVE TO BE BROUGHT UNDER GOVT CONTROL BEFORE NORMALCY IS RESTORED.

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